

## Journey to Samoa 2016

In April 2016, I went on a mission to Samoa as my "Nana's Agent" to learn about some ancient stone ruins known as the "House of the Octopus". Nana's father, James Baxter Fleck, had visited them in 1917 and Nana was very keen to find some answers about their existence. The other reason for my trip was to keep the contact with our Samoan family alive. Sadly, Cyclone Amos put a halt to my plans to visit the ruins but I still managed to make some new family connections and renew some old ones.

### DAY ONE - Thursday 21st April



August 16, 2017

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2016

Touch down!

Wow, this is the first time I've been out of New Zealand for 8 years. The last time was to Samoa in 2009 for Mike and Esther's wedding. I can't believe how lucky I am to be back again!

The climate in Upolu is humid but comfortable. A bustling little airport but one of Nana's contacts, Joan Macfarlane, found me and walked me out to her jeep – I want one! It was awesome to do the first road trip from the airport during the day this time. We drove to Joan and Paul's place first: Ifiele'ele Plantation – absolutely stunning. I am definitely coming back here one day – better start saving! Joan seems very comfortable in her own skin and very settled in her gorgeous fale with beautiful guest accommodation attached. Joan and her husband, Paul Lepou, have put in a huge amount of work to make this place what it is. Check it out: [www.ifieleele.com/](http://www.ifieleele.com/) I loved their open-air dining table and kitchen and the postcard view of the coconut palms with the ocean in the distance.

(NB Some photos taken on my phone so quality is not the best)



After visiting Joan and Paul's place, we had an easy trip to Global Travel Agency in downtown Apia to meet "Cousin" Jackie. It turns out that she owns the place! Very impressive. After a quick catch up, I took a short wander around downtown Apia and had a a nosy in a couple of

shops. I had no idea what was cheap or not, so I gave up on shopping and kept walking to find the coast.



Love those buses!



It felt great to go for a walk and I made it as far as the coastline in front of Aggie Gray's hotel. I took a few photos, then headed back to meet Jackie at Global Travel at 4.30pm. Her first planned stop was to visit George and Sita (her husband Vincent's parents). I wasn't sure about them to start with – do they really have a maid?! (They call her 'The House Girl!'). We ate banana cake and drank cups of tea while looking over Nana's photo album she'd made for me to bring, and talking about her new research. George was very interested in hearing about the Fale o Le Fe'e but sceptical that we will make it – there's supposedly a cyclone coming soon! Great.

Sita didn't have much much to say but she's the one that remembers the names! What an amazing life they have had – travelling for George's (and Sita's?) work as a Diplomat to Wellington and Brussels and loads of other places I gather.

Then it was off to Jackie and Vincent's place. Wow – it's pretty fancy for these parts and I have my own amazing, huge accommodation. It just worked out that they didn't have anyone booked in to stay during this time - lucky me! I was invited to dinner with the family and I am in love with Jasna, their three year old, she's got so much energy. She's just like this little bubble bouncing along beside me! She made me "dinner" with her toys before we sat down to our real dinner.





After dinner, I had a Skype with my girls (after a few technical difficulties) and then headed back to my “rooms” to read some more of Nana’s notes and write this diary. I need to be up an away by 8am for breakfast with George and Sita and a whole day to explore Apia!



Enter your comment...



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## DAY TWO - Friday 22nd April



August 15, 2017

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April

8am start – breakfast with George and Sita; pawpaw with lime squirted on it – yum! Muesli and scrambled eggs on toast...and the rest! I attempted to taste a bit of everything just to be polite and Sita said afterwards that I didn't eat very much!

George helped me to make some phone calls to some more of Nana's contacts; "the Judge" and Steven Percival and I made an appointment made for 11.30 – 12.30 to meet Judge Vui Clarence at the Courthouse. We couldn't get hold of Steven but flukily Joan rang soon after and said she'd been trying to sort out a meeting with him to talk about our hike to the Fale o le Fe'e.

George then drove me to the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum - he said he was going up that way to get a haircut anyway.

What an absolutely lovely old house, so well-loved and the gardens surrounding it were beautiful too. The plants each make an individual statement – so bold, like the dresses of the Samoan women. I definitely need more colour in my wardrobe!





11.30am – caught a taxi into town to the Information Centre. Re-grouped (in air conditioning!), made sure my plan was clear and then headed off to meet the Judge at the Courthouse in Mulinu'u. What a massive building. Loads of people were standing around on the long covered terrace outside – I wondered if everyone was there to do “business” or just hanging out in the shade?

It was really busy outside the Court House but no one seemed to be attended to inside. I finally found the right desk to ask for the Judge – two people checked me out and questioned me a bit dubiously (I found out later from the Judge's joke about my dress that shorts might have been a tad inappropriate – whoops, I didn't even think about it at the time - faux pas!)

Someone finally said they would take me to the Judge and guided me through a maze of long beige coloured corridors to the Judge's office. What an absolutely lovely man. Ha, ha I sat in his chair for a photo (at his suggestion) and felt like an idiot!! (I think you can tell the cringe factor by the look on my face!)



The Judge told me that, sadly, he wouldn't be able to go on the hike and that Steven wasn't sure about it either – especially as there is a cyclone due on the weekend! We may have to go on Monday, I would need to talk to Steven about a Plan B.



I found my way out of the beige maze somehow and found Joan waiting for me in the carpark as arranged. It was nice to see her again and she drove us about 15 minutes up Cross Island Road to meet Steven Percival for lunch at Home Cafe. What a great cafe, so quirky and a bit grungy - just my style. It is built inside an old warehouse next to the Vaisigano River. I really wasn't expecting anything like it in Samoa - it's full of lots of funky, up-cycled furniture and retro knick knacks (I'd love to bring you here Amy!)





Steven has made a short film about archaeology in Samoa – featuring the House of the Octopus. It featured an interesting account of the Octopus myth. He's a very passionate and quietly dedicated man - much respected too.



Joan needed to leave so we said goodbye after our huge meal of burgers (yum) and coconut drink. I waited at the cafe for a bit while Steven went to pick up something from his office. He then drove me up to the Art Centre (right beside his house) where I met his wife, Wendy, and her apprentice, Olivia, who were busy making some beautiful ceramics. I was very inspired by their beautiful set up, the studio, gallery and location. Wendy's latest paintings are gorgeous. They were about to be exhibited but the exhibition is being postponed due to the approaching cyclone.



I didn't see Steven again after that, so I wasn't sure what to do. I just walked out along a dirt track, which felt very remote, and passed this impressive Bahai Temple. I'm not sure how to explain my impression of it – it's a bit weird in this particular landscape – a bit like an alien space ship that's just landed in the Amazon Rainforest!





Once I got to the main road, I stopped two boys who were walking along and asked them what the name of the road was. I thought I could phone “Ray’s Taxis” - the taxi-driver who took me to Vailima yesterday. But they didn’t understand me so I said “fa’afetai” and decided just to flag down the next taxi to drive past. Luckily one came along soonafter and I met Paul, a driver for Ray’s Taxis (nice coincidence), and his wife and two year old daughter. I hadn’t actually thought too much about where I would go next but everyone I met was talking about the cyclone coming, so I decided I really needed to head back into Apia. The only landmark I could think of near Jackie’s office was McDonalds! So from there, I walked to the Global Travel Agency and picked up a few presents for my girls on the way.

Jackie finished her phone calls and drove us over to the Cathedral to check out one of her new business projects. She’s part of a women’s business group that are starting up a Catholic Souvenir’s shop next door to the Cathedral. They own and manage several other businesses too, including a resort (which I never made it to even though I was invited! Shame!) The Cathedral is incredible. (Jackie’s shop next door should be finished by the time you visit Alisi).



I then walked across the road to the looming Central Bank where I'd arranged (via text) to meet Seri. I waited down stairs in the lobby – it's always easy for Samoan people to find me when we first meet – the lone palangi sweating in the corner! We talked about our new plan to go to Savaii on Monday (she hadn't asked for time off work for Friday and it was too short notice so we agreed to change our trip to Monday (and crossed my fingers that the hike to the House of the Octopus would definitely go ahead on Saturday so that Monday was free for our trip to Savaii). I had to make a snap decision and really hoped it was the right one!



Seri introduced me to her husband, Aso. They're both such lovely, hospitable people, I'm looking forward to get to know them better on our trip to Savaii.

I then walked to SportsLotto to buy some gators for the big hike - the only thing I forgot to pack! After lots of searching and some strange looks, I came out with a pair of insanely expensive rugby socks!! They were the only thing I could find to protect my legs! Ha, ha what a weird thing for a palangi woman to buy in a sports shop in Samoa!!

After that I decided I should buy a bottle of wine to contribute for dinner at George and Sita's, so I wandered over to the shops in the main street. I looked for the big supermarket that we went to with our friends on my last trip to Samoa, it was just across the road from the Central Bank. It was still there but completely abandoned and looking in the windows, it was just totally full of rubbish...weird, I thought it would be in a prime spot for the tourists..? I wonder if the fire in the old fruit and veg market had affected the number of tourists coming into this part of town? I found a small supermarket and checked my bag in at the bag counter, then drifted around trying to make sense of the prices. I realised that I didn't have much of a clue about the exchange rate so I just bought the cheapest bottle of wine for dinner (sorry guys!) and a few snacks and things I thought my girls might like.



I walked back to Global Travel to meet Jackie who gave me a ride back to the house – a swim was first on my list! Jasna and the neighbour's "house girl" were already in the pool so I made a beeline for my fave to change into my togs.

On the way to George and Sita's we stopped to pick up some takeaway pizzas – Jackie and Vincent are obviously regulars there! The pizzas were divine – shared in the company of George, Sita, Jackie, Vincent, Jasna and Calvin (their youngest son – aged about 12, I would guess...apparently 3 year old Jasna was a bit of a 'surprise' for Jackie and Vincent!) I was introduced to Fa'ausi for desert, a kind of sweet burnt-tasting dumpling made with pawpaw (?) rolled in flour, and caramelised in an outdoor oven. Different... and not in a bad way actually. After lots of talk about the cyclone, we then went home to weather the storm!



Enter your comment...

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## DAY THREE - Saturday 23rd April



August 14, 2017

Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> April

The plan was for me to walk up to the Fale o le fe'e today but it's been called off. It would just be way too wet and slippery with all the rain we've had. What a shame, but it can't be helped so...to Plan B. My first call was to Nana..."What is Plan B??" The Museum of Samoa is closed, the library is closed – everything is closed due to approaching cyclone! We've been told it's a Category 2...what does that mean to me?? Not a lot, I've never been in a cyclone before! It's heading to American Samoa Jackie tells me, which should probably reassure me but she doesn't sound that reassured herself!

Nana suggests a visit to the University of Samoa, so off I go, even though I'm a bit doubtful that it will be open...everything seems to be closing down as the cyclone warnings come through. I caught a taxi...another very friendly, chatty taxi driver...but it's a no-go. The University grounds are completely deserted. There's only a security guard there to answer my questions. Strange palangi woman, doesn't she know there's a cyclone coming?! I'm starting to realise that this is big...there's going to be some MAJOR rain and I'm hoping it's not going to close any roads or stop any flights!

I get the taxi driver to take me to the big Fruit and Vege market in downtown Apia. It's the new one that replaced the one by the wharf that burnt down (we visited there last time). I ask the driver what he knows about the cyclone and he is the second driver to say "God loves Samoa". That's all he says and his confidence actually makes me feel a bit better, they are so devout here and so unashamed about it.

The Fruit and Vege Market is massive and heaving with people and produce. Nearly half of the stalls are dedicated to selling souvenirs but it's the flower stalls that made the biggest impression on me. The bouquets were absolutely stunning. I bought a couple of baskets from the souvenir stalls, one for me and one for Nana. I just fell in love with the

combination of traditional woven baskets with kitch plastic-coated fabrics - so cool! I

walked around for ages trying to decide on a few souvenirs and when I finally did buy the ones I liked, a woman in the next stall told my vendor off very loudly! Then she slammed some money down on the counter and stormed off?? No idea what that was about? A bet of some sort?!



I needed some lunch at this point, so I went to “Billy’s Burgers” next to the market and chose a Medium Burger Combo. When ordering “Medium” in Samoa, read “Super-size”! After eating as much as I could, I waddled next door to the mini-mart to buy a few emergency supplies for the cyclone: batteries, a torch, some water and even some candles. Loads of other people were doing the same thing. No one seemed to be in panic mode though, so I kept telling myself not to go overboard and waste money on stuff that I would just have to get rid of before I left the country. But it’s hard not to start thinking about the worst case scenario when a) there’s a Category 2 Cyclone coming b) you don’t know what a Category 2 Cyclone is and c) you’re in a foreign country where everyone knows what to prepare for except you!

After supply shopping, I walked back towards Jackie’s shop. The rain was getting a bit more persistent now. Downtown Apia is just big enough to be a bit confusing for the first couple of days but by now I had my bearings and decided to check out “Unique Thrifty” across the road from Global Travel Agency - I’d had my eye on it. My friends wouldn’t be surprised to know that I was making a beeline for a second-hand shop in Samoa...I just can’t help myself! I was actually surprised that it was open because the taxi driver had told me that “everything closes at midday” on the weekend. I spent about half an hour in there looking for dresses for my girls and finally found some that looked the right size - not like the ones at the market which I imagined might end up in our dress-up box at home. Ha, ha, they were pretty garish – crazy bold patterns and colours, nothing subtle....although, to be honest, my girls probably would have adored them!

A kind lady at the Unique Thrifty checkout offered me some smoky taro cooked in coconut cream and wrapped in a leaf of some sort (banana?) The smoky taste is definitely growing on me. Unfortunately I got really distracted by the yummy taro and the impending cyclone, that I ran out and left the dresses behind in the shop!!

The rain was coming down harder when I left the shop so I flagged down the next taxi to drive past and headed “home” to Lotopa. I asked the taxi-driver to drop me outside the food-mart at the Lotopa shops (about 2 minutes from Jackie and Vincent’s place) and stocked up on some food supplies; tinned food, toilet paper etc. I thought it might be a good idea to get some money out in case I needed it in an emergency...not really sure what for...maybe taxis or road-side food stalls?? Luckily there was an ANZ (my bank) ATM right next to the shop so I took a rough stab at working out the exchange rate and got out some tala.

After a chill-out in “my” fale, I went to the main house to see if Jackie and Vincent were around but their Fijian House Girl, Tia, told me they were away in town so I had a glass of wine and a play with Jasna while I waited. I talked a bit with Tia about her life. She’s a lovely gentle soul who has left her children behind in Fiji to make a living for her family in Samoa. Her husband is in England, also trying to make some money for the family back

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## DAY FOUR - Sunday 24th April



August 13, 2017

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April

7:38am – I am awake and the wind has stopped. Now I'm wondering if the storm is over or we're experiencing the calmness of the "eye" of the storm??! I got out of bed, checked my text messages to see who really cares about me!! Ha! Looked out the window to the neighbours on the sea side of my fale and there are quite a few coconut trees down – one has landed on the neighbour's car! That must have been one of the big crashes I heard in the night. It's quite surreal looking over to the group of primitive-looking fale next door while I stand in my (mostly) dry mansion for one person! The people don't seem to be panicking, their fale look ok but they have obviously suffered some damage to their roof (can you see the collapsed roof in the photo below? They must have been using lots of heavy stuff to hold it down but it collapsed anyway) There's also a fire burning to cook the breakfast, not sure if this is an everyday necessity or because the cyclone has caused a power-cut.



I had a quick breakfast and a strong coffee, then ventured out of my fale very trepidly to suss out the damage and use the WIFI beside the pool. There are lots of big branches lying around the property but no damage to the buildings that I could see. The water is receding now, it was quite an impressive small "lake" outside my fale last night. Did a bit of internet searching and found out that the road to Lano has been washed away! Unbelievably I was supposed to stay at the Joelan Beach Fales in Lano last night and that's the place that has suffered the most damage in Samoa from what I can tell from my quick search of major news sites. A close call!

I talked to Jackie and Vincent, luckily there was no damage on their property but they hadn't had much sleep either. I also found out that if the thunder stops, this means the storm is passing. Wish I'd known this earlier, I might have got a bit more sleep!

It seems that most of Apia are attending church this morning to thank God for being kind to Samoa and saving her from the cyclone. (Unfortunately American Samoa is directly in the line of the cyclone and hasn't fared so well). I declined an invitation to attend church and hoped that I hadn't offended Jackie and Vincent but I really didn't want to spend my second to last full day sitting in church for hours with no understanding of the language or protocol! The feeling reminded me of the painful school assemblies I had to attend once a week in Japan, where I thought I might pass out either from the heat or boredom of not understanding a word of what was being said!

Had a second breakfast with Tia - it felt rude not to! (Actually three different types of breakfast in one sitting seems to be the norm since I've been here!) I talked more to Tia about her life and would have loved to take her along with me into



Apia but she had to stay at home to look after Jasna while the rest of the family were at church.

I decided to do some exploring around Apia and suss out how bad the damage had been from the cyclone – there were lots of reports and photos online and downtown Apia looked like it had experienced some serious flooding in the night. Here's a photo of some guys pulling down the boards to hold out the torrential rain. There were still a few sandbags in front of shops in the main streets but no evidence of flooding or debris on the roads - they must have had the road sweepers out early.



Jasna was also spared a visit to church and asked me to come for a swim with her. On the way back to my fale to get my togs, I met the neighbours in the "mansion" next to mine. I asked them if everything was ok in their house and told them about their car window. They didn't seem bothered about it but appreciated my concern.

After a swim and shower, I headed into Apia by taxi, with the aim of visiting the Palolo Deep Marine reserve to check out the snorkelling. I'd been there before with Esther and Mike and crew for their wedding and remembered the amazing warm water from last time. I discovered that it's not really the same on your own but it's still a stunning spot. The water was very murky from the cyclone and there was a lot of rubbish around the entrance to the swimming reserve...probably a result of the cyclone. I took some photos of the debris washed up on the foreshore – lots of rubbish, coconut leaves and branches everywhere.





I was quite hungry after my swim, so I asked the woman at Palolo Deep where the nearest place was for some food. She said that nothing would be open on Sunday so I just headed off along Beach Road looking for any sort of sustenance! I came across a couple of open restaurants and found a comfy spot inside the Annabelle Inn. I felt right at home with the New Zealand Rugby commentary playing in the background and a supremely delicious coconut to drink with a straw.



Next stop, I popped into the I-Site again to find out about an airport shuttle for Tuesday.

I then caught a taxi back to Lotopa and spent some time dozing in my room, still so tired from lack of sleep the night before. We had all been invited to “dinner” at George and Sita’s, so we (Jackie, Jasna, Calvin and I) drove over to their fale. I met Nigel and Cian, Lorenzo and Seina (sp?) and their friend Russo (oh dear I can’t actually read my writing here but Nigel and Lorenzo are Vincent’s brothers – two more of George and Sita’s boys). When we got there, we chatted for quite awhile and then finally some food came out to us on the deck, courtesy of their House Girl. However it turned out just to be a cup of tea, some crackers and cheese and cake! I guess most people here have their Sunday “dinner” in the middle of the day. I tried not to make too much of a pig of myself and had another supper snack back at my fale! (Here’s a picture of “my” fale with a stunning sunset behind it):





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## DAY FIVE - Monday 25th April



August 12, 2017

Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April

ANZAC DAY – The Big Day

4:30am - Woke up and got ready to be picked up at 5am by Seri and Aso her husband, who drove us to the ferry at Mulifanua Wharf.

6:00am – Just made it to the ferry terminal in time! Lots of sleepy passengers onboard (going to work or coming home?) There weren't many seats left as we were so late getting onboard.



(This guy looked like I felt after hardly any sleep for 2 nights! Still...I'm in...Samoa!)

Some nice guys moved to make room for Seri and I and I couldn't stop looking at the guy sitting next to me. We chatted for a bit... "Where are you from?" "What are doing in Samoa?" etc until we both realised that we had met each other the day before – he is my neighbour in Lotopa! The partner of the English woman, living in the "mansion" about 5 metres away from mine! Ha, ha! And I thought New Zealand was small!!

7:30am – Arrived at Salelologa in Savaii. We found somewhere to have breakfast, coffee and some time to compare notes about what we knew of John Key and the extended family in Lano.

8:00am – Caught a bus to Lano. I loved the open windows and the reggae music, a fantastic way to travel. Savaii definitely feels a lot more rural than the parts of Upolu I visited. I didn't want to miss a single thing as we rattled along the gravel roads past houses, people, churches, dogs, pigs and everything that I associate with the essence of Samoa. I played the total tourist, snapping photos the whole way!

I couldn't believe the carnage near Joelan Beach Fales. This was where I was supposed to stay on the night of the

cyclone!



Road repairs after it was washed away at Lano



Joelan Beach Fales



8:30am – Arrived in Lano. We visited one of Seri's Uncles first – he lives across the road from the property where Monkey Jack's grave is. I assume this was protocol, to let this particular uncle know we had arrived before visiting the rest of the family in the main house on the sea side of the road. We also paid our respects to her Uncle Mulitalo Stowers who passed away in 2001.





House across the road from the Lano Stowers family

When we arrived at the house across the road, I received quite a formal welcome speech from another uncle with Seri translating. I really wish I had written down their names, I'm annoyed with myself about that! It was quite overwhelming at the time and I didn't think of it until afterwards! (I will find out from Seri).

It was very kind that they took some time out from cleaning up around their property after the cyclone and I was given a tour by Seri and her uncle. I was first shown the ruins of the old house where Monkey Jack lived, very close to the current family dwellings.



Clean up time - there were fallen trees, branches and dried silt everywhere



Some remains of Monkey Jack's house



Seri stands next to the remains of a wall

During this tour Seri's uncle (I didn't actually realise how close our family connection was until that point!!) apparently said that I could have a 'matai' title if I wanted one....! That was a strange feeling because I definitely didn't want to come across as some sort of superior VIP...I was just expecting to meet some long-lost family and learn a few more details for Nana!

Seri was obviously enjoying catching up with her family and it seemed like they had some matters to discuss, so I asked if I could take a wander out to the beach. I wasn't expecting it to be so rocky but as we travelled further along the coast, I could see that it's mostly made up of lava rocks and not the white sands that have been deposited at the resorts!



Inside the house at Lano

After some farewell hugs and photos around the graves of Monkey Jack and his wife, we left to meet up with Seri's father for a ride to Sale'aula. Unfortunately this ride fell through, much to Seri's embarrassment, but it didn't worry me – we were there on a mission and Nana had given me instructions just to get a taxi if I ever needed it! So we flagged down the next one and we were on our way!



Monkey Jack's grave on the land close by to where his first house was built



Uncle standing next to Monkey Jack's wife's grave - Malia Matalena Toga Sua

Spot the difference in these 2 photos... (apart from the different people next to me...)





The taxi took us to Bayview Resort in Sale'aula where we met a lady called Joan at the desk. There was also another young woman working there and when I showed them Nana's book "Pouniu", Joan instantly recognised a very young Esther sitting on Nana's right in the photo on page 26! (I think this gave us a bit more credibility when Seri started asking questions a bit later on!)



We asked Joan if she could take us to the ruins of Kingi's house, which was less than 5 minutes from the resort restaurant. I was so excited to be there! While I walked around taking photos, Seri talked to Joan and I heard her asking "Whose land is this?" Seri told me afterwards that Joan was hesitant to answer at first but then she just came out with the truth – it's Kingi's land, he bought it freehold from the government. Seri was very excited about this! Joan told Seri that when the resort had sought to extend their carpark (see photo) next to the restaurant, the first family of John Siaki Key (Susana's father) who live in the village of Sale'aula and also in the fale next to the ruins, had tried to make a case to claim the land as John Key's – in an attempt to stop the car park from being built. However it was investigated by the Village Council and found that it was officially Kingi's land and not his father-in-law's (John Key).



We needed a debrief after the revelation of this information! So we decided to go to the restaurant for lunch and a much-needed cold drink. After this surprising news, we decided to take a walk down through the resort villas to the beach and take a look at the land that technically belongs to the Kingi's descendants.



The resort sits right on the edge of a semi-lagoon and Kingi's land is to the right of the resort – as you can see in the photo below. There is a wooden fence running along the boundary line and on the other side it's mostly lava fields with lush palms and other vegetation growing through the cracks in the lava.





The lagoon is stunning (below) and looking at Google Maps it looks like the ocean beach would be beautiful too, although I'm not sure how easy it would be to access it.



We were told that one of the main family members making the claim to Kingi's land was Elizabeth/Isapeta. (I learnt later that she was the Great-Great Granddaughter of John Key's first wife Falema'a. Our family line comes from his second marriage to Mary Stowers – whose father was John Stowers; also known as "Monkey Jack"). Seri thought we should go and visit Isapeta as she lived close by, just across the road from Sale'aula School.

I wasn't quite sure what to expect from our visit to Isapeta's house. I thought it might be quite bit tense considering she's been contesting the rights to Kingi's land. But as it turned out, they were all very welcoming to us. Isapeta was lovely (not that I could understand a word she said...other than the occasional "John Siaki Key" interspersed throughout the conversation) but Seri told me afterwards that she had some of her facts muddled. One of the things she said was that John Key was married to Susana – luckily Seri is really clued up on her (and our) family tree!

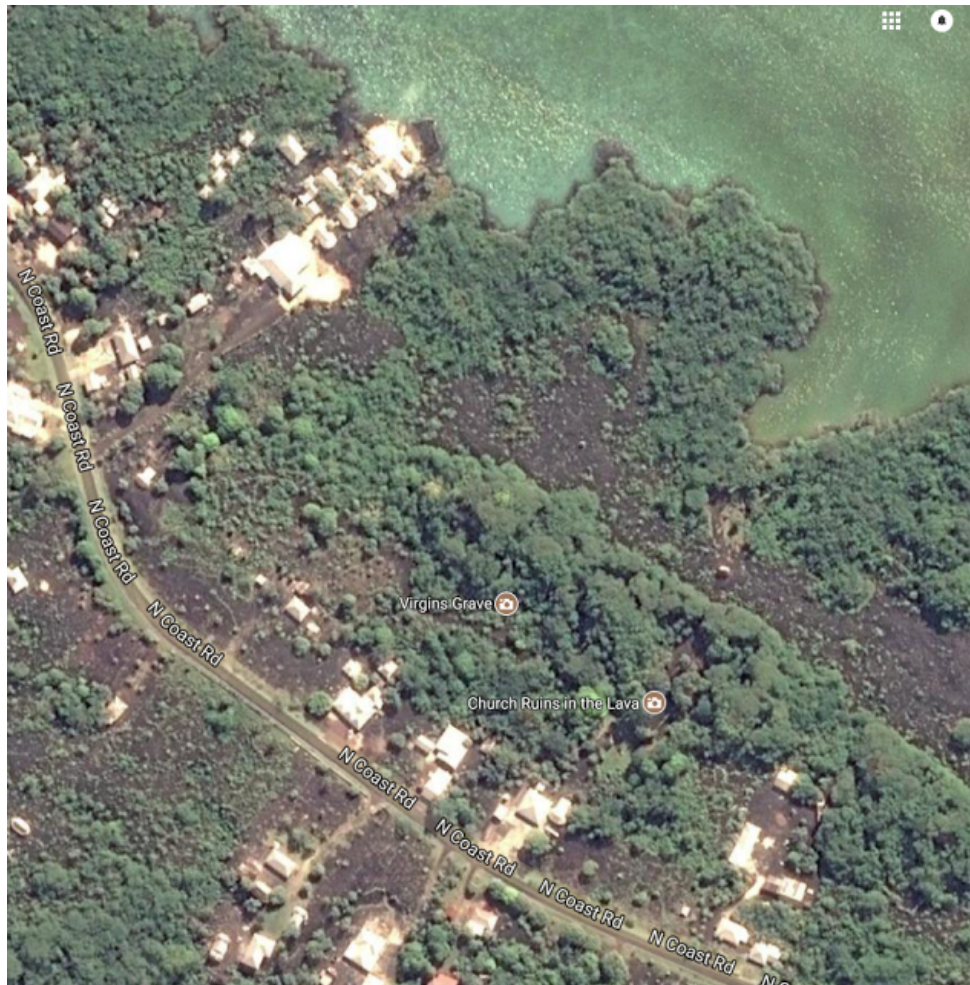


Isapeta and her daughter Amelia

There were quite a few people coming and going around Isapeta's fale, mostly cleaning up branches that had been strewn around after the cyclone. Seri did lots of talking with Isapeta and her daughter Amelia but I mostly sat and observed this busy family, living in pretty poor conditions.

(Note – I'm not sure if Bayview Resort is placed wrongly on Google Maps or if there are two main parts to the resort. This screenshot below shows the part of the resort that we visited - the cluster of buildings that run up to the coast at the top left of the screenshot. Google Maps places the resort as further north along the North Coast Road. The large white building towards the top of the shot is the restaurant and you can see the extended car park to the right of it. The photos I took are from the water's edge – beyond all of the chalets.)

After meeting Isapeta and her family, she sent us to “meet” her brother Robert who lived across the road from the LMS Church Ruins. You can see the house in the screenshot (I hope that’s the right one!)



We decided to take a look at the LMS Church ruins first and as we paid our entry fee we noticed that our taxi driver just wandered in without paying, ha!





Exploring the ruins, you can really get a sense of how slow moving the lava was during the eruption that destroyed the church and village over a matter of years!

We asked the ladies at the LMS Church kiosk if they knew where Robert lived and they pointed to a house right across the road. We were just going to walk up the driveway but a pack of nasty dogs came out and barked at us so we took the taxi right up to the house!

At this fale, we met Susana Key! She is the daughter of Robert Key who passed away in 2005. We stayed and talked for about 10 minutes and I gave Susana Nana's card so she could get in touch with her, but I was a bit doubtful about their email abilities - their fale was very sparse. Susana was planning a trip to New Zealand soon so I said I hoped she might get in contact (I gather that hasn't happened though).



After meeting Susana and her family (look at those amazing smiles!), we headed straight back into the taxi to Salelaloga Wharf, hoping we would make it in time for our ferry!





Samoan taxis make our New Zealand ones seem seriously boring!

We arrived in Salelaloga with plenty of time to spare, so we grabbed something to eat at “Uncle Bill’s Burgers” and talked non-stop about what we’d learnt during the day. We made loads more scribbly notes on the family trees in Nana’s “Handbook for Andrea” and Seri corrected a few possible mistakes as well as adding some more of her own information and things we’d learned today.



It was hard not to fall asleep on the ferry back to Upolu – the 4.30am start didn’t help! Aso picked us up from the ferry terminal at 6.45pm, just as the sun was setting, and we had a lovely trip back to Apia with a few laughs on the way. Aso was a bit taken aback when I told him we’d had some snacks at Salelaloga, he thought I said “snakes”!! They are such a lovely couple and I feel privileged to have met them.

Back at Lotopa, I had a quick dinner with Jackie and Tia and told them all about my huge day. Jackie had mentioned something to me previously about a land dispute at Saleaula and was interested to hear what we had learnt.

I managed to send Nana a Facebook message about my day and then skyped my girls and Jeremy before heading off to my fale. I just had one last and very LONG entry to make in my diary before crashing out for the night.



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## Journey to Samoa 2016

In April 2016, I went on a mission to Samoa as my "Nana's Agent" to learn about some ancient stone ruins known as the "House of the Octopus". Nana's father, James Baxter Fleck, had visited them in 1917 and Nana was very keen to find some answers about their existence. The other reason for my trip was to keep the contact with our Samoan family alive. Sadly, Cyclone Amos put a halt to my plans to visit the ruins but I still managed to make some new family connections and renew some old ones.

## DAY SIX - Tuesday 26th April



August 11, 2017

Tuesday 26th April

Departure Day

George and Sita kindly gave me a ride to the Faleolo Airport, about an hour from Apia. They are lovely, hospitable people and I hope that some of my extended family will look them up on future visits.



George and Sita Fepule'ai (I can spell that and say that now!!!) and one very sweaty palangi!

It was such a whirlwind trip but I'm stoked that I managed to write a lot of my experiences down...even if I couldn't achieve Nana's mission to visit the Fale o le Fe'e.

I'm hopeful that some of the information I've found out about our family history will be useful and that in the least we've made some stronger connections over here. I'd love to see some sort of "bach" built on Kingi's land for all of our extended family to share...that's a discussion to be had when we're all together. And hopefully I can come back one day and bring my girls, the next generation of the King/Key/Stowers families.

Thank you Nana for the amazing, once in a life-time, opportunity to visit Samoa on your behalf. I will never forget my time here and can't wait to come back!



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